

FOREWORD

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This year, at the beginning of the final decade in which we commit ourselves to reach the goal of Health for All by the Year 2000, the Steering Group is meeting to consider the progress of the Commonwealth Health Development Programme. There is, at this time, a renewed emphasis on the importance of human resource development as a key strategy in improving the working of health services. Development is seen as not simply furthering a series of isolated donor projects in particular enclaves but improving the functioning of the whole health system. In particular, Ministries of Health are directing efforts to enhance the skills of all who work in health.

Human resource development can be assisted by the twinning or linking of institutions in developing countries with similar but more mature organizations in other parts of the world. It has proved an effective way "to transfer know-how, train staff and build up management capabilities" [Cooper 1984].

Given the slow growth of development assistance budgets and the hard choices that have to be made in relation to health investments, institutional collaboration schemes offer low-cost mechanisms to help improve the functioning of the parts of the national health system, in particular allowing staff to acquire a "self-sustaining confidence about local and international sources of specialized knowledge and technology" [King 1986].

The Commonwealth is uniquely placed to help in two ways. First, there is the interweaving between the member states of "cultures, politics, literatures, sociologies and social technologies" [King 1986] and the common use of the English language. Second, and perhaps more important at the present time, when many LDCs and particularly those in Africa are sliding into a deepening crisis of poverty and hunger, the World Bank has reinforced the need for tenets of conduct that the Commonwealth has long upheld: "a determination to respect the rule of law and vigorous protection of the freedom of the press and human rights". Human potential, says the Bank, must be given absolute priority through

better health, education, infrastructures and communications and also through better and more equitable government. Better health depends critically on a well functioning health system manned by able staff with "efficient training and supervision".[World Bank 1989].

It is within this framework that the future dimensions, financing and potential of institutional links will be examined by the Steering Group. From the discussions it is hoped that a working plan for action can be drawn up.